

WINEMAKER OF THE YEAR

Rob Diletti – the quiet achiever

Rob Diletti is understated and reserved. Flamboyance is not a word in the Diletti lexicon. Not one for boasting or seeking the spotlight, he goes about his business tucked away in his winery in the Porongurup, quietly and with total professionalism making great wine.

He doesn't have to boast or push his barrow. Others do that for him. In addition to making wine under his own Castle Rock Estate label, he makes wine for many other producers in the Great Southern and they are more than happy to let everyone know that he is their winemaker.

It's almost an endorsement of their wines because most people in the industry know that Diletti is one of the State's best winemakers.

He is quiet but certain in his judgement. A few years ago I was judging with him at the Perth Royal Wine Show and there was, shall we say, a robust discussion about one of the wines, needing him to adjudicate and make the final decision.

A thoughtful sniff, a considered sip and a series of quick and concise comments before he made his choice, thanked all, and then moved to the next panel of judges.

No fanfare. Simply clarity and certainty.

Typical of his humility, he attributes the success of Castle Rock to the decision his parents Angelo and Wendy made in planting the vineyard on an east-facing slope of the Porongurup Range.

Rob's early years working in the family's vineyard sparked his passion for grape growing. This interest led him to pursue a degree in Wine Science from Charles Sturt University which was complemented by experience at wineries such as Mountadam Wines, Grosset Wines, Plantagenet Wines, and Jean Grenier in Alsace, as well as Alkoomi Wines.

In 2001, Rob co-designed the Castle Rock Estate winery, a 200-tonne facility. His return to Castle Rock marked the beginning of a new chapter, where his winemaking skills quickly attracted attention and accolades.

His achievements include the Tony Smith Scholarship, Young Achiever of the Year by the Wine Industry Association of Western Australia, and Young Winemaker of the Year by Wine Selectors.

Rob's influence extends beyond the winery, with his active role in wine show judging nationwide. He has served as a panel leader at the Perth Royal Wine Show, the Wine Show of WA, the Margaret River Wine Show, and the Sydney Royal Wine Show. Has also received one of 12 scholarships for the annual Len Evans Tutorial in 2005.

At Castle Rock Estate, Rob adheres to the philosophy that "fruit is king," aiming to showcase the purest expression of their unique terroir. The estate's east-facing site, with its early morning sun and cooling easterly breezes, provides an ideal environment for riesling and pinot noir, varieties for which Diletti is best known.

He has a meticulous approach to viticulture, focusing on factors like vine fruit load, sunlight penetration, and airflow, to produce fruit that reflect their distinct origin. His minimal intervention in winemaking preserves the varietal character of the wines, while traditional techniques for reds enhance their complexity and structure.

He says: "To achieve this, we need ripe and pristine fruit, that is free of stress and disease. We achieve this through careful vineyard management, focusing on a vine's fruit load, sunlight penetration and airflow through the canopy/vineyard.

"Within the winery, we minimise winemaker intervention where possible to maintain a wine's varietal expression.

"Avoiding unnecessary skin contact, maceration and oxidation is how we achieve this with white varieties. Whereas when working with red varieties, we follow more traditional winemaking methods such as the use of oak barrels, whole bunch fermentations, and extended maceration to build complexity and structure, but never at the detriment of varietal expression.

The easterly aspect, in my opinion, has turned out to be what makes our site so unique. We get the early morning sun and not the hot afternoon sun, the prevailing wind in summer is easterly.

In most of WA, it is hot, but for us, it comes off the bight, so there is a cooling sea breeze, although we are only 300m above sea level, the surrounding land is low and flat, so I believe that the way the easterly is uplifted as it hits the Porongurups is important too

Rob Diletti's unwavering commitment to quality and innovation has cemented Castle Rock Estate's reputation as one of the region's finest producers. His ability to produce consistently outstanding wines, particularly riesling and pinot noir has led to numerous awards and accolades. His role as a contract winemaker for other grape growers has also brought acclaim, further highlighting his exceptional skills and influence in the wine industry.

I have tasted many of Diletti's wines over the years, his own and those under other labels, and the underlying feature is the preservation of fruity purity and vibrancy. There is no unnecessary interference. Just a deft touch of the winemaker's hand when the fruit needs a little coaxing to head it in the right direction.

A worthy recipient of Winemaker of the Year.





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